

# bookreview

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## Cloud Computing For Lawyers

By Nicole Black, published in 2012, 222 pages

“Cloud computing” has become the hot technology topic lately, and many lawyers are looking for information and guidance to help them both better understand the concept and integrate it into their firms. Nicole Black, founder of a company that educates lawyers on emerging legal technologies, has set out to explain the risks and benefits of computing in the “cloud,” and provide lawyers with advice on the software and services currently out there.

The first point the author makes is that while the term “cloud” is new, the functionality isn’t. Any service accessed online that isn’t hosted in the lawyer’s office is already in the cloud (e.g., Gmail, Google Docs, Netflix, Facebook, etc.). The question really is: Are lawyers ready to have their law practice software and client information managed in the same way? There are many potential benefits in terms of cost and convenience (for both staff and clients), but the technologies are also fairly new and there is much that lawyers need to think through.

This book contains chapters on both ethical and security matters lawyers need to keep in mind. Ethical questions to consider when storing data remotely and creating a greater online presence include the nature of the lawyer-client relationship when contact is done online, the security of client information, and electronic discovery requirements for remotely stored information. (This section deals with ABA Rules, but similar questions are faced by Ontario lawyers.) As many of these are recent issues, regulations and case law have not always kept pace.

The security questions can be equally complex. Where will the stored data be located (of particular interest to Canadian lawyers who may not want their client data to fall under the *Patriot Act*)? How will it be backed up? What happens in the event of a system

failure that leaves it temporarily inaccessible? These can seem like daunting questions, but the author points out that in terms of security, online cloud storage may in many cases be safer than outdated or jerry-rigged computer setups many lawyers currently have in their offices. In some cases the cloud may be the better security option.

For lawyers who have made the decision to move parts of their practice software into the cloud, the remainder of the book looks at how best to do this. A lot depends on how established a firm’s practice management software already is. New lawyers just starting out have the most flexibility in choosing which functions to move online. Firms that have already invested heavily in in-house storage and software may be more constrained. For most it will be a matter of choosing which software services can best complement or replace their existing systems.

Some applications are free, and some come at a cost, but there are high quality programs in both categories. Google’s Apps for Business, for example, is free (certain extra functions can be paid for), but offers high quality email, word-processing, spreadsheet and calendaring systems. However, lawyers are more likely to be interested in software designed to be run in a law office, and these are generally not free. The author reviews popular programs such as Clio, Rocket Matters, LexisNexis Firm Manager and Total Attorneys Practice Management System.

Lawyers exploring the benefits of running aspects of their practice in the “cloud” have a lot to consider. This book provides a good introduction to the technical concepts, ethical issues and currently available software, and will be welcomed by lawyers who have been searching for guidance on this topic. ■

Tim Lemieux is practicePRO coordinator at LAWPRO.

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